

This TIME, the truth could unravel tax initiative

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What with all the dismal news lately - jobs disappearing, banks teetering, gas the approximate price of a fine wine - I figure we're all due for a good laugh.

And so I give you . . . the TIME initiative - Transportation and Infrastructure Moving Arizona's Economy.

The business and political leaders who put this thing on the November ballot are now suing the state "to correct an unethical and potentially illegal maneuver," "to ensure that Arizona voters get a balanced and accurate description" of their \$42.6 billion plan.

It seems that someone is trying to sucker punch their proposition. Make that a group of someones. Specifically, the Republican legislators who sit on the panel that writes descriptions of propositions that'll be on the ballot.

"Their move," says David Martin, chairman of the TIME Coalition and president of the Arizona chapter of the Associated General Contractors, "is a slap in the face to the initiative process and the people of Arizona and is a desperate attempt to scuttle a citizen's initiative designed to improve quality of life and provide transportation options."

So what, you must wonder, did these dastardly Republicans do, to be slapping and scuttling?

They told the truth.

In writing the description of the TIME initiative that'll go to voters, they say the

plan would raise the state sales tax by 17.8 percent.

The power set prefers to think of it as a penny on the dollar. They also prefer much more talk about what we'd be buying and less about what we'd be buying it with.

And so they went to court this week, asking that the Republicans be ordered to produce an "unbiased factual summary" which is code for "PULEEEASE don't call it a 17.8 percent tax hike."

"The Legislative Council's description," they wrote, "is not helpful to voters, some of whom will surely be confused by the language and take it to mean that for every dollar spent on goods, they will have to pay an additional 17.8 cents in sales tax rather than an additional one cent in sales tax."

To which I say this: hahahahahahahaha.

Here's an excerpt from the description approved: "The transaction privilege tax ("sales tax") and the use tax would be increased from 5.6 cents per one dollar to 6.6 cents per one dollar (a 17.8 percent tax

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increase)."

Somehow, I'm guessing voters will puzzle out what that means. Just as I'm guessing they'll remember that this is the group that cut a deal with home builders, agreeing not to include a fee on new development as part of their plan.

One would think that if one felt the largest tax increase in state history is justified, one would sell it. Instead, TIME hopes to hide it.

Which is bold - and brilliant.

Putting one over on the voters, after all, is a time-honored tradition in this state. It's why pols love to tell you they cut taxes, never mind that what you pay always seems to go up. It's why every city and school district says your taxes won't go up if you give them millions more to spend, never bothering to mention how much your taxes would go down if you don't.

In their lawsuit, the TIME folks point out that Republicans, in their descriptions of tobacco-tax propositions in 2006, 2002 and 1994, never mentioned how much, percentagewise, taxes would rise. They're right. In 2006, a tax to fund kids' programs was referred to as an 80-cent-a-pack increase.

Can you imagine what might have happened, had voters realized they were raising the cigarette tax by 68 percent? Or that it was a 68 percent increase on top of the 556 percent hike in the tax on cigarettes over the previous 12 years?

All three, by the way, breezed by voters, proving that in politics that old axiom about honesty isn't true.

You know, the one that says it's the best policy?

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